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Our Society-Sick But Salvageable

Honors Special Studies

Ouachita Baptist University

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by

Sharon Lynne Wilson

Our Society-Sick But Salvageable

Remember the Preamble to the Constitution?

"We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity..." Great phrases, and the greatest of all is "We the people of the United States."

As we look at our society, a sick one to be sure and to the social inequities which are so prevalent among many peoples, we are compelled by that remaining small fragment of a characteristic called "compassion" to ask the question--are we just living the words found in the above mentioned historic document with our mouths, but hardly with our hearts? Do we really want equality for all? Do we sincerely put forth an effort to completely obliterate the inequities to be found in the matter of social equality for all citizens? It is quite evident the norm is to "let be that which is to be." We are quite capable and generally accede to the philosophy of Darwin who said, "It must be the survival of the fittest for mankind." There is no time for stopping to look upon those who are less successful, less fortunate than we. There is no time to stop and take inventory of our values with regard to the "down and outers." We are too busy scaling the ladder of success. We are too busy grasping to acquire more status symbols. We have become a society blinded to the needs of others except to contribute a few morsels of money to some cause organized to assist those economically depressed.

We have become a fragmented society which needs to be pulled together again. We can re-create an America in which men speak to one another in trust and mutual respect, sharing common objectives, working toward common goals. We can return this nation to a path of confidence and well-being. We can design a society capable of continuous renewal. We can do these things. No one can do them for us.

To better defend my above-mentioned evaluation of the society in which we live, let me lead you to look into the deep recesses of large minority group (the Black Community) which has within the last "8" years (1964 Civil Rights Bill) emerged from ten years (the 1954 Civil Rights Bill) of struggling to awaken their own group as well as the peoples of our great country to the fact that there is a distinction between black and white: there is the weapon of discrimination being wielded at the black people: There are inequalities in various aspects of the great American dream namely, education, housing and job opportunities. In the South, it is open segregation. In the North, it is de facto segregation.

Since the early 1600's, when the white man exploited the cruel, heartless, but lucrative slave trade, the Negro has been relegated to a stereo-type position of meniality. He has been subjected to the abuses of the white community which have been nothing short of indescribable. Such as, the documented case of the black man who was castrated by the Ku Klux Klan for looking unusually friendly at a white woman. Or, the case of the white Southern gentleman plantation master who forced one of his slave women to have sexual relations with him, and then killed her husband when he learned of the incident and threatened to report him. The white man pleaded self-defense though the black man had no weapon.

Such abuses, such injustices, such disregard of human dignities completely demoralized the Negro and he resigned himself to what he considered the inevitable fate of all black people--a life of slavery.

But alas, our country did produce some courageous men who generated a concern about the welfare of the black man and these few set out to do something about his rights as a human being even though they did not look upon him as a citizen. Out of this concern came the Emancipation Proclamation. It also produced the great Civil War which has left its scars to this day in the form of a subtle animosity between the North and South.

The years following proved the Emancipation Proclamation but a piece of paper save for a few token amendments benefiting the black man who could press his rights in court. But the indignities remained, the meniality remained, and until the Supreme court broke out of its lethargic complacency in 1954, the black man remained a suppressed entity worthy of only the low-down, dirty, hot and sweaty jobs from which to derive his livelihood.

For the ten years following the historic ruling of the United States Supreme Court, there emerged from the black community the non-violent movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King. This Black Saviour was to leave his mark upon the conscience of America and emblazon a trail which would eventually lead to the re-establishment of the dignity of the black man and the lifting of his people to a level of respectability. Following his untimely death, there was no one found to "fill his shoes." As a result, the militants, the extremists and the revolutionaries have set out to corral the black community. In doing so, they have instilled within many black people

a hate for "whitey" and they have been instrumental in inciting them to riot, loot, kill, demonstrate and commit acts of civil disobedience. At the same time, they have exploited their own people to gain notoriety, politically and socially. They have irreparably damaged the image Dr. King tried to project. They have created a tension between black and white which could eventually lead to a bloody confrontation in the streets of our large cities.

The ghettos still remain. This street or quarter of a city which was formerly the place where the Jews were compelled to live during the mediaeval period. Now the black community has dislodged the Jew. In this place which the white man has upgraded from the broken down three, four or more family units to the sixteen floor high rise concrete complexes. It is here the black man reflects on his plight and generates further hate for the white who, they are told, is the reason for them being there. It is from here he goes to his low-class, low-paying job which carries with it little opportunity to advance and enable him to flee this hot-bed of indignity, indecency and inequity. It is from here his children go to schools where the quality of education is sub-par. Schools to which few, if any, high-caliber, well equipped educators will go.

The ghetto becomes as chains of slavery which were his ancestors as they were herded together on stench-laden slave ships to be sold in a foreign country on some cold, depressing trading block. These chains tighten about him as he looks at his plight and determines his fate to be one of no advancement, no future. This makes him depressed, despondent, and discouraged. It also makes him vulnerable to the onslaught of the revolutionaries jargon and oftentimes

incites him to riot, loot, kill and disregard both civil and moral laws. He inevitably slips into a deeper depression which can then lead to that which will give him some temporary release drugs. Subjection to these guarantees his return to a different kind of slavery than his ancestors knew-a slavery which destroys the mind, as well as the body.

The ghetto, which is an area where members of an ethnic group are forced to live, and from which it is a criminal offense to emerge without license, must become a place where such members choose to live, and from which ideally, anybody can emerge anytime he wishes.

Lest the foregoing seem to be bias and partial in the direction of the black community, we must agree that in many cases the Negro has abused his right to dissent. I cite a few examples.

--Upon the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, young negroes (teenagers mostly) ran rampant through some areas of our major cities, New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Chicago destroying, looting, and in some cases, wounding innocent people. To them, and psychiatrists will concur, they were venting their emotions against the establishment which, to them took the life of their "Black Saviour." Just as a child who wants attention by doing the extraordinary, so the black man made havoc of property of others to draw attention to his plight. (30 million dollars worth of property destroyed in Chicago alone).

--In the "asphalt jungles" of our cities the negro prowls like stalking leopards seeking out his prey, in this case, whitey. He has made the streets unsafe for pedestrian and vehicular traf-

fic after dark. The parks no longer are places in which friends, lovers and nature people can stroll without worry in the cool of the evening. Witness the recent killings in Lincoln and Jackson Parks.

--In the ghetto schools, and particularly the one in which my father teaches, there come nearly 2100 children into a school that should accommodate no more than 1200. They are children, nearly all, with inbred tendencies to lie, cheat and steal. They, nearly all, have already developed hatred and defiance for their peers. They rebel at discipline; they resent correcting; they defy authority. They have been taught to hate everything that is white, namely, the white man. Their black hypnotists, the spell-binders and persuaders, the Jesse Jackson's, the Gus Savages, the Ed Berrys, the Calvin Morris', the C.T. Vivians have inoculated enough hate venom into the veins of the parents of these children that indirectly they are affected and in turn begin to cultivate a budding hatred for all but the black. To better illustrate the above, I cite you a case in point--after being asked of my father how many children he had in his family, it was suggested by one child that he bring some of his kids to school. Another, a few desks behind where Dad was standing said, "Yes, so we can kill em!" This from a twelve year old capable of doing this type mayhem.

--To better illustrate the deplorable conditions that prevail in both the ghetto schools and the adjacent high-rise ghettos, I recently interviewed the principal of the Colman

Elementary school adjacent to the notorious Taylor high-rise apartments in Chicago, Illinois. He has been principal at this school for seventeen years. He related to me that September 1963 was the beginning of what was to develop into the present day jungle of the ghettos in Chicago. He told me tales of students coming to school with loaded guns, switch-blades, brass knuckles and other lethal weapons. He recalled boycotts, walk-outs, confrontations between black police officers and over-grown black boy giants at the school. He also said that he had given up on the courts to get any action done in handling the incorrigibles. The court, he said, would merely reprimand the child and let him go. He told of being shot at by a sniper and having his life threatened on numerous occasions. He also related some awesome incidents at the Taylor homes where he has a cockroach infested branch school of ten classrooms. There was the time when a woman threw her lover out of a sixteenth floor apartment to his death in the foot and a half impression he made in the ground, and then the case of the assistant principal who narrowly missed being killed by an empty case of coke bottles dropped from one of the apartments. Then there was the case, which I remembered, of the three policemen who were nearly barbecued in one of the elevators while attempting to apprehend a law violator. He called them animals and was at a loss to prescribe a remedy for the ills of the inner city. He did state that upon assuming his position, there was a deplorable rate of over 70% failures in the school due, he mentioned, to the poor quality of teachers and sub-standard education. This has improved to a 25% failure rate and a bet-

ter quality of education. He also stated there were students at a nearby High School (some graduates from his school) who had a second grade level of reading and were being taught Chemistry. Incidentally, my father has a thirteen year old boy in his class who spent four years in first grade.

These few cases are multiplied in other ghetto areas of Chicago, some being worse than others. But they should lead us to ask--Where does the fault lie? Who is to assume the blame? How can this problem be solved? Where do we start?

Socially speaking, what kind of society do we want as Americans? Do we want a society which does not care for its own vitality? One which would do away with private enterprise? Or, do we want a society that says every person is important, that organizations and institutions exist for individuals? Do we want a society capable of continuous renewal ~~so~~ to develop to the fullest its human resources, capable of removing obstacles to individual fulfillment, that emphasizes education, lifelong learning and self discovery?

If our ^{answer} is yes to the above, we must work simultaneously along two parallel lines: We must ask the individual to accept certain kinds of responsibility, and we must create the institutional framework in which individual responsibility and participation are feasible to all Americans. We can do these things. No one can do them for us.

Dr. Chambliss,

Merry Christmas to you and your family, and have a very Happy New Year. It's been great having you for a counselor this past year and a half. You've helped me an awful lot, probably in more ways than you realize, and I really appreciate it. Thanks ever so much for everything.

Love,

Sharon

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